

pathway to perch in a low bush. After I had stopped, it flew back down to the grass to feed. Migrant warblers are extreme rarities in Seychelles and need to be checked thoroughly. As I had no binoculars, paper, pen or camera with me, I decided to go back for these. When I returned, the bird was still there.

It was a small, fairly slender *Phylloscopus* with a clean appearance and a long, pale yellow supercilium prominent in front and behind the eye. Upperparts were pale brown; underparts whitish with a trace of yellow on the chin and throat. This initially suggested Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*. However, the plain dark ear-coverts, prominent lower white eye crescent and dark legs pointed to Chiffchaff *P. collybita*. Northern and eastern races (eg *abietinus*) can have a prominent supercilium and a rather clean appearance. The bird fed in a rather restless manner, persistently flicking its wings and dipping its tail. This behaviour is unlike that of Willow Warbler, which usually gives only one desultory dip to the tail after alighting or none at all. From photos subsequently examined by the SBRC, the primary projection was measured as 7–10 mm, with the tertial length 15–18 mm (39–67%). For Willow Warbler, the percentage would be 75–100%.

The SBRC has accepted this as the first record of Chiffchaff for Seychelles. Race was left undetermined, though the most likely appears to be *abietinus* (Scandinavian Chiffchaff), which has a more obvious supercilium and is more grey-brown above and paler below than the nominate. Nominate *collybita* breeds in western Europe east to Poland merging with *abietinus*, which breeds in Scandinavia and western Russia, and *tristis* (Siberian Chiffchaff), which breeds in Russia from the Pechora basin east. All three races

are migratory, wintering from sub-Saharan tropical Africa and Arabia to northern India. *P. c. abietinus* is the race found in East Africa⁶.

There have been three previous records in Seychelles of Willow Warbler and two of indeterminate Willow Warbler / Chiffchaff. Other records of migrant warblers in the country include Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (one), Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* (one), Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* (two), Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (one) and Common Whitethroat *S. communis* (one); just 11 records involving seven species, indicating that a warbler crossing the Indian Ocean to reach Seychelles is a rare, or at least an under-recorded, event.

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Parasitic Weaver *Anomalospiza imberbis*, new to Benin

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Le 1er juillet 2002, un mâle *Anomalospiza* (Tisserin) parasite *Anomalospiza imberbis* a été observé dans le sud du Bénin, le long de la route Cotonou–Lomé. Ceci constitue la première mention pour le pays.

Parasitic Weaver *Anomalospiza imberbis* is described as a 'very local and patchily distributed, uncommon to rare resident' throughout its West African range¹. There are no published records for Benin: it is not mentioned in Dowsett's country list³, nor in later publications documenting additional species. It has, however, been recorded in Togo and Nigeria^{2,4}.

On 1 July 2002, along the main Cotonou–Lomé road, 9 km east of the Mono River, in south Benin (06°28'N 01°82'E), I observed a small, rather weaver-like bird, which I identified as a male Parasitic Weaver. It was perched in an area of flooded grassland and had a striking yellow head and underparts, a deep-based black bill and lightly streaked flanks. It held its bill open, but remained silent. I was able

to observe it in detail and for several minutes, at a distance of c3 m, from an overhead bridge.

Parasitic Weaver is known to parasitise cisticolas, prinias and other small passerines¹, all of which were observed in the area. Given its small size, the male's distinctive plumage, and habitat, confusion with other species is most unlikely. Considering its status in West Africa, it is an interesting addition to the Benin list, although, given its occurrence in neighbouring countries, its presence was to be expected.

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The first Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* for Madagascar

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L'auteur rapporte l'observation d'un Bécasseau à queue pointue *Calidris acuminata* à Toliara, dans le sud-ouest de Madagascar, le 10 novembre 1999. Il s'agit de la première mention pour le pays. L'espèce niche dans le nord-est de la Sibérie et hiverne au sud de l'équateur dans les îles du Pacifique occidental, en Australie et en Nouvelle Zélande. Des occasionnels ont été signalés aux Seychelles, mais pas en Afrique continentale.

On the afternoon of 10 November 1999 I was birdwatching with Cliff Waller and others at lagoons near Toliara airport, south-west Madagascar. The vast majority of waders present were Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, of which there were at least 800. These were all in winter plumage, presenting a remarkably uniform, plain grey appearance. When I found a scaly brown wader among them, I was immediately intrigued. Although initially observed from the rear, size, structure and plumage features swiftly eliminated Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and I knew it was either a Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* or a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata*. I have extensive field experience of the former from the UK and the Americas, but not of the latter, although I was aware of its features, the species being a very rare vagrant to the UK. As the bird exhibited a number of characters I would not associate with Pectoral Sandpiper (see below), I felt it had to be a Sharp-tailed, a view reinforced when it revealed its lack of a pectoral band. CW, who has extensive field experience of this species, unequivocally proclaimed it to be a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. We studied the bird through 20–60 x 80 telescopes for the next 20 minutes at ranges down to 70 m and made the following notes.

Description

Medium-sized sandpiper, slightly larger and more pot-bellied than accompanying Curlew Sandpipers, with primaries not projecting beyond tail. Similar to Pectoral Sandpiper, but looking more 'lanky-legged'. Head appeared relatively small and flat crowned, with a neat chestnut cap streaked darker and contrasting with a bold whitish supercilium, which clearly extended behind the eye. Upperparts largely brown; feathers with white fringes contrasting with darker centres, creating a distinctly scaly appearance. Throat white. Breast washed pale peach, lacking

obvious dark markings except for a few brown streaks at the sides. Rest of underparts white. Bill relatively short and slightly decurved, tipped dark brown with paler, pinkish base at least to lower mandible. Legs yellowish olive. In flight, showed a narrow white wingbar. Rump and uppertail pattern typically calidrid, with blackish central band separating white sides. No call heard.

Identification

Identified as Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and differentiated from Pectoral Sandpiper by the combination of chestnut cap, conspicuous broad supercilium clearly extending behind the eye, lack of clear-cut band of streaks across the breast (streaks restricted to sides), peach wash to the breast and subtle differences in shape (longer legged, pot-bellied and smaller headed)^{1,2}. The white upperparts fringing combined with the peach breast coloration suggest it was a first-year moulting into winter plumage.

Status and distribution

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper breeds in north-eastern Siberia, leaving its breeding grounds in July–September to winter south of the equator on islands in the western Pacific and in Australia and New Zealand^{1,3}. Vagrants have been reported from Seychelles (October–February and July)⁵, but not from mainland Africa⁶. It is not included in the most recent work on the birds of Madagascar⁴ and this record appears to be the first for the island.

References

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